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SUBJECT: HHS SECRETARY LEAVITT'S VISIT TO MALI

REF: A. BAMAKO 40
[1](#)B. BAMAKO 735

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1.(U) Summary. U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Michael O. Leavitt's August 13 to 16, 2008 visit to Mali reinforced the United States' strong support for the health sector in this country and, in particular, for malaria eradication and research. Visiting several sites throughout Mali, the Secretary observed and participated in PMI activities designed to reduce malarial deaths in Mali by fifty percent under President Bush's Malaria Initiative (PMI). In meetings with Malian President Amadou Toumani Toure, Minister of Health Oumar Ibrahima Toure, local officials, researchers and practitioners, the Secretary heard first-hand how PMI malaria- eradication efforts are affecting Malians at all levels. He also received thanks from the Malian government and community officials and for the U.S. Government's commitment to malarial research and eradication. In a very moving ceremony on August 14, at the Embassy in Bamako, Secretary Leavitt presented a Jefferson Star to the husband and children of Kellie Lartigue, who died in Mali in December 2007 while serving as the in-country Director for the HHS Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

2.(U) Summary continued. Joining the Secretary in Mali were the President's Malaria Coordinator, Rear Admiral R. Timothy Ziemer (U.S. Navy, ret.); Director of the HHS Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Julie Gerberding; Special Assistant to the Secretary for International Affairs at HHS, William Steiger; HHS Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation Benjamin Sasse; Deputy HHS Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, Holly Babin; the Director for Africa in the HHS Office of Global Health Affairs, Dr. Samuel Adeniyi-Jones; and Counselor to Secretary Leavitt, Richard Campanelli. The Regional Director for Africa of the World Health Organization, Dr. Luis Gomes Sambo, also joined the Secretary for most of his visit. End Summary.

Meeting with the Minister of Health

3.(SBU) The Secretary officially began his visit on Friday, August 15, by meeting with his Malian counterpart, Minister of Health Oumar Ibrahima Toure. During this meeting, the Minister told the Secretary about several new initiatives in Mali. He mentioned the development of a telemedicine network to connect medical centers throughout Mali, for which the Government of Mali is seeking support. The Minister also discussed an initiative to increase reproductive health care, including voluntary family planning and maternal, prenatal and postnatal care.

(Comment: It remains to be seen how more traditional elements of Malian society will greet this initiative. Recent attempts to repeal the death penalty and change family law to provide stronger protection for women failed after protests led by religious leaders. End comment.) In

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addition to thanking the Minister for the cooperation in vaccination and malaria initiatives, the Secretary shared with the Minister that Malian Dr. Michel Sidibe would be an excellent candidate for Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), but that it would behoove African nations to agree on a single candidate to put forward. The Secretary and the Minister discussed the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between HHS and the University of Mali School of Medicine and Pharmacy for the Center of Excellence in Malaria Research. HHS has transmitted a draft of the text to the Malian government in both English and French and is awaiting feedback. Although the Minister of Higher Education has jurisdiction over the University (and would be the signatory on the MOU), Minister Toure offered to help gain the necessary clearances with the Malian Government. (Note: HHS has proposed doing the signing through a Digital Video Conference later this Fall. End note.)

Commemorating a Fallen Colleague

4.(U) HHS/CDC Director Dr. Gerberding and Minister Toure joined the Secretary in presenting the Jefferson Star for Foreign Service to the family of HHS/CDC employee Kellie Lartigue, who died in an automobile accident in Mali on December 21, 2007. Secretary Leavitt praised Kellie's devotion to combating the spread of HIV in Africa (Ref. A). During a private meeting with the Lartigue family, the Secretary reiterated his profound respect for the passion Kellie brought to her work in saving lives in Africa.

Anti-Malarial Spraying

5.(U) The Secretary and his party traveled to Koulikoro, 45 miles from Bamako, to take part in a mosquito eradication project under the PMI. After touring a warehouse stocked with equipment supplied by the U.S. Government for pesticide spraying inside homes, the Secretary, along with Minister Toure, Admiral Ziemer, Dr. Gerberding and Dr. Sambo donned protective gear to help spray the interior of a local residence. In talking to the press after the spraying, Secretary Leavitt expressed his gratitude for the levels of cooperation the spraying project has received from Malian partners and the public. Admiral Ziemer observed that Mali's interior spraying program is among the best-developed and executed he has seen.

Hearing from Peace Corps Volunteers

6.(U) The Secretary and his delegation met over lunch with four Peace Corps volunteers who are working on health and small-enterprise development projects in Mali. The Secretary heard specifically about malnutrition and malaria problems the volunteers deal with on a daily basis. The volunteers also spoke to the Secretary about challenges

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they faced at the community level when trying to improve health care among largely illiterate, poverty-stricken populations.

HHS Funded Research on View

7.(U) The Secretary and his delegation, again accompanied by the Minister of Health, called on the research laboratories at the University of Mali School of Medicine and Pharmacy, funded by the HHS National Institutes of Health (NIH). Included were the HIV/Tuberculosis lab, a parasitology lab and the mosquito-breeding room. The Secretary expressed pleasant surprise at the depth and sophistication of anti-malarial and other research activity underway at the school. Upon seeing a Level-3 bio-containment lab, funded by HHS, members of the Secretary's group expressed pride the United States had helped make such a facility available to researchers in Western Africa.

8.(U) The Secretary then addressed a group of Malian researchers, professors and students. After promising to work for continued U.S. support for the malaria and HIV/AIDS initiatives in Africa, and thanking the students and researchers for their work, the Secretary heard from several faculty who expressed their desires for funding from the United States (and the Malian Government) in other areas of public health, including potable water and mental health. The Secretary then fielded questions from students on several topics. One of the students asked about funding for malaria-related basic research, as opposed to the applied focus of PMI. Admiral Ziemer responded that other organizations supported basic research, mentioning specifically the Gates Foundation, and that PMI would continue to carry out projects aimed at real-time reductions in infections and deaths from malaria in the field.

Timbuktu

9.(U) On Saturday, August 16, 2008, the Secretary, Minister Toure, Dr. Sambo and the HHS delegation flew to Timbuktu. After meeting with local officials, the delegation toured a new health center, and then met with civic leaders from the area. After reiterating the support of the United States for health activities in Mali, the Secretary heard from different non-governmental organizations on their efforts in the northern part of the country. In responding to questions, the Secretary stated that he would push for continued funding of malaria-eradication projects under the PMI, stressed the importance of HIV testing, and promised to look into the possibility of potable-water projects in the region. (Comment: Local women were particularly vocal in their advocacy for help to improve their communities, especially regarding water. End comment.)

10.(U) The Secretary also met with members of a U.S. Special Forces detachment that spent two months in northern

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Mali to provide medical and veterinary care in remote areas in the desert. The team briefed the Secretary on their activities in healing camels and families, and spoke of helping to bring the Malian Government and basic health care to places that had not seen either in some time. Members of the Secretary's delegation, coincidentally, discovered in conversations with the Director of the Provincial Hospital in Timbuktu, that teams of Cuban health workers are stationed at that hospital and two locations in the desert, on two-year assignments, embedded in the communities.

11.(U) The Secretary's party then paid a courtesy call on Abderrahmane ben Essayouti, the Grand Imam of Timbuktu.

When asked by the Secretary what was his main concern for his followers, the Imam answered that peace and security were the most important. The Imam added that this includes health, and that he frequently includes messages on HIV/AIDS, malaria and other health concerns when preaching to his flock. The Imam then personally guided the delegation through his partially U.S. funded library of ancient Islamic manuscripts, some dating from the eleventh century, and then provided a tour of the fourteenth-century mud-walled, sand-floored Djingareyber Mosque next door.

Very Personal Insights from the President

12.(SBU) The Secretary, together with the Charge, Dr. Adeniyi-Jones and Mr. Steiger, met with the Honorable Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT), President of Mali, on the evening of August 16, 2008. The President's comments regarding the August 6 coup d'etat in neighboring Mauritania are reported in Ref. B. After discussing their mutual respect for the Malian-USA relationship and intention to continue and expand cooperation, Secretary Leavitt informed ATT of our support for Mali's candidate Dr. Sidibe for the UNAIDS Executive Director position. He also asked ATT about his role in the military overthrow of Mali's former dictator, Moussa Traore, in 1991. Secretary Leavitt asked ATT why he did what he did, what he told his family, and how, after taking power, was ATT able to step away from the Presidency, unlike so many others who overthrow Governments. ATT responded he felt obliged to take action when it became clear the Moussa Traore regime did not understand the people's desire for democracy. ATT said he made his final decision to oust Traore when the military began killing citizens, including women and children. As for his family, ATT said he gathered his military gear, and told his wife that he simply needed to go to his office because of the troubles. The next morning, he called his wife to inform her he was Head of State. He also said he and the others involved in the coup had accomplished what they wanted, the removal of the dictatorship, and that once a stable Government had been set up and elected,

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it was time for them to retire from the spotlight and let democracy work its course. The Secretary wondered if ATT intended to write a book, since his life held lessons for many, not just in Africa but throughout the world. ATT said he was planning on doing just that when his second and final presidential term ends, in 2012.

Comment

13.(SBU) The visit by Secretary Leavitt demonstrably reinforced the priority the United States places on its relationship with Mali, particularly when it comes to health and development. Well-covered in the press, the range of activities by the Secretary underlined how these activities touch all Malians. The Secretary also left with a clear understanding the Malians are serious when it comes to improving their health care, whether it be through clinics in isolated areas, anti-mosquito campaigns, or conducting world-class research. The Secretary also saw his perceptions reinforced that health-diplomacy efforts undertaken by U.S. military units are a powerful tool for pursuing national-security, political and humanitarian goals. The presence of Cubans in the Malian desert also underscores the importance some nations, which do not share our values, place on medical missions as a means to gain goodwill and curry political favor, with the potential to undermine our own effort. The Secretary intends to advocate for more deployments like the one he saw in Timbuktu. End comment.

¶14. (U) Secretary Leavitt's party cleared this cable.

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